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R NEA/ARN 538

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington, D.C. 20520

April 7, 1981

Dear Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of March 9 forwarding a copy of the Memorandum prepared by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee concerning the proposed sales of F-15 enhancement items to Saudi Arabia. You asked for our comments on the memorandum and I am pleased to enclose our response.

As you know, officials of the Departments of Defense and State have been consulting very closely with many Members of the Congress in the process of reaching Administration decisions on the sales. We greatly appreciate the exchange of views we have had with you and others and hope to stay in continuing contact with Members on these issues as we move toward notification.

During our consultations we were struck very forcefully by the virtual unanimity in the assessment of the Members that the strategic position of the United States and the West in the Middle East/Persian Gulf region has seriously deteriorated. Many Members expressed the concern that the United States must respond quickly and effectively to deal with the threat to our friends and to our own interests in the area.

This is the precise objective of our proposed sales. These proposals form part of our broad strategic concept for dealing with the growing Soviet presence in the region. The Soviets will pursue all opportunities to weaken the stability of friendly nations and to aggravate and exploit tensions between regional states. We face a situation that demands a meaningful U.S. contribution if the erosion in security is to be halted.

The Honorable
Lee H. Hamilton, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives.

In order for the United States to play a more active and direct role in protecting its own interests, however, we must strengthen the confidence of our friends by showing a willingness to help them defend their own national security. Helping our friends to defend themselves is closely associated in the Middle East policy of this Administration with the continuing search for a settlement to the Arab/Israel crisis. Security and peace are elements of our policy that cannot be separated. They are efforts towards the single objective: the development of conditions in the Middle East designed to block the Soviet advance and to protect vital American national interests and those of our friends.

Sincerely,

Richard Fairbanks
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Comments on AIPAC MEMORANDUM.

Drafted: NEA/ARP:HPrecht:slr
3/19/81:x25353
Cleared: NEA:JWTwinam
H:RFlaten (draft)
PM:LBrown (draft)
S/P:Fairchild (draft)
DOD:Col. Garrison (draft)
T:Mr. Buckley
P 0031-0871

1. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...The addition of FAST packs and AIM-9Ls will significantly enhance the offensive capability of the Saudi Air Force... An F-15 so equipped has a combat radius of more than 1,000 miles compared with about 450 miles for an F-15 without the pods. The FAST packs permit Saudi aircraft to operate out of any base in Saudi Arabia against any target in Israel."

Department of State Comments

Saudi Arabia has requested additional equipment for its F-15s in order to provide a stronger defensive capability against the increased regional threat.

The conformal fuel tanks will increase the flying time and combat radius of an F-15 by about 40-70 percent, depending upon the flight profile (altitude and speed of flight) and payload (type and number of munitions carried). This will enable the Saudis to base their F-15s at airfields in the western part of the Kingdom and still carry out defensive missions over the strategic oil fields and facilities in the Eastern Province. Without conformal fuel tanks, the F-15s would have to be based at airfields in the eastern portion of the country in order to defend the oil facilities, and would thus be vulnerable to pre-emptive strikes on those airfields during the first hours of an attack. The added fuel tanks could also increase the length of time that an F-15 could remain on patrol over the oil fields, thus enhancing the protection for those vital facilities.

The AIM-9L missiles will provide the Saudi F-15s with an improved air-to-air defensive weapon which will provide a head-on intercept capability, thus reducing the time required for maneuvering in an air combat situation, and increasing the likelihood of successfully intercepting and destroying attacking aircraft before they strike their targets. Like the fuel tanks, the new missiles will augment the capability of the F-15s to defend the oil facilities located within the combat range of potentially hostile aircraft from the northeast.

2. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...There is no threat facing Saudi Arabia which justifies the sale. The Soviet forces in Afghanistan are more than 1,000 miles from Saudi Arabia's eastern coast. Soviet expansionism unsettles the region, but it is Iran and Pakistan that are directly threatened, not Saudi Arabia. Credibility is strained in imagining Saudi Arabia using the enhanced range of its F-15s to strike at Soviet military targets in western Afghanistan ... South Yemen is deterred -- as it has always been -- by the obstacles of desert and distance... Saudi Arabia requires nothing more to protect itself from a weak, probably imaginery threat from South Yemen... There is little likelihood of an invasion of Saudi Arabia from Iraq...Iranian threats to Saudi Arabia have been blunted by the Iraq/Iran war...Today, Arab quantitative advantage is growing while Israel's qualitative edge has become dangerously eroded."

Department of State Comments

The most likely military threat confronting Saudi Arabia now and in the future is the danger that it will be attacked by neighboring Soviet-backed regimes. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution and the Iraq/Iran war underscore the extreme volatility in the region and the continuing danger that the Soviet Union will exploit instability to exert pressure or threaten Saudi Arabia through surrogates. Both Iran and Iraq are controlled by regimes that are ideologically hostile to Saudi Arabia and Saudi military planners must regard both countries as serious potential threats. Providing Saudi Arabia with effective defenses will strengthen its deterrent capability and ability to deal with political pressures from across the Persian Gulf.

Although it does not seem very likely that Saudi Arabia will have to engage Soviet aircraft in combat, that possibility cannot be excluded. The USSR could move major ground units to the Persian Gulf within a few days or land airborne troops directly in Saudi Arabia. Should there be a Soviet attack on the oil fields, Saudi Arabia should be in a position to offer a first line defense, while the commonality of equipment with the United States would enable our forces to move into the conflict more rapidly and efficiently.

The threat from South Yemen is not "weak" or "imaginery". South Yemen, well-armed and trained by the USSR, has attacked Saudi Arabia three times within the past 12 years. Although

these engagements were limited, they carry a political message and it is important that Saudi Arabia be sufficiently well armed to deter any further adventurous actions by South Yemen in the future. The South Yemen threat to Saudi Arabia cannot be lightly dismissed given that country's past performance, its close links with both the Soviet Union and Marxist Ethiopia and the large number of East European and Cuban advisors it employs.

3. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...Saudi Arabia is much less stable today than it was three years ago...The takeover of the Grand Mosque provides ample evidence...F-15s are of no value in meeting internal upheavals. The United States must not repeat the errors made in Iran by selling much advanced weaponry to an unstable client with internal discontentment rather than external threats."

Department of State Comments

It is simply not true that Saudi Arabia is much less stable today than it was three years ago. For example, there were disturbances among the Shi'as in the Eastern Province in 1979, but these were not repeated in 1980. The Saudi Government is proceeding carefully with its development programs so as to avoid unnecessary tensions and dislocations. In our judgment, the Mecca Mosque attack was carried out by religious fanatics, whose action had no popular support in Saudi Arabia.

Our sales of military equipment to Saudi Arabia are intended to counter external threats. At the same time, an improved defensive capability will enhance Saudi confidence and ability to deal effectively with external pressures that work against internal stability. A refusal, however, by the United States to help Saudi Arabia meet its legitimate defense needs would build popular dissatisfaction with close U.S.-Saudi ties.

4. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...The sale will not strengthen the Arab-Israeli peace process, since Saudi Arabia has been, and continues to be, a leading opponent of the Camp David Accords."

Department of State Comments

Saudi Arabia has indicated it opposes the Camp David agreements because in its view the Accords to not deal adequately with the problems of the Palestinians and Jerusalem. Prior to the Camp David Accords, Saudi Arabia

7. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...Several times, including last month at the Taif Summit, Saudi leaders called for Jihad (holy war) against the Jewish state. In the past 32 years, Saudi forces have been engaged four times -- three of them against Israel."

Department of State Comments

Saudi leaders have assured the United States that they have no offensive intentions against any country including Israel. Saudi forces have never been engaged with Israel in significant combat. For example, in the 1973 war, Saudi troops en route to take up reserve positions in Syria briefly encountered an Israeli patrol. There was some

gave its active support to the peace process. Saudi Arabia continues to advocate a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israel crisis. The Saudis have consistently sought to reduce dangerous tensions in the region. The moderation of the Saudi approach has been greeted with hostility by such radical states as Libya.

As Saudi Arabia feels more secure in its own defense capability and in the reliability of US support, the Saudis will be able to consider their role in the peace process from a perspective of greater confidence. Saudi Arabia has great influence with the moderate states of the region and it will be important to enlist Saudi cooperation with a renewed peace effort.

The US considers the issues of peace and security in the Middle East to be mutually reinforcing. A comprehensive peace settlement must be based on security for the regional states. The development of adequate security must be accompanied by movement towards peace.

5. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...The Kingdom cannot defend itself over a broad front. The land mass is simply too large and the population base available for the armed forces is much too small.

Department of State Comments

As the AIPAC Memorandum notes, the Saudi military is very pressed for manpower. The purpose of our sale of AIM-9Ls and conformal fuel tanks is to increase the efficiency of Saudi air defense assets while minimizing additional demands on Saudi manpower. With these enhancements the Saudis will be better able to defend their oil facilities and population centers from remote bases and with a reduced number of aircraft.

cooperation with us. Improved U.S.-Saudi ties will be reflected in better relations with neighboring regional states.

In the months ahead, we anticipate active consultations with the Saudis on ways that we can cooperate to strengthen the US presence in the Persian Gulf region to deter the Soviet Union.

9. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...The sale will not lead to oil price moderation or increased Saudi production. If anything, the sale will appear to be appeasement in the face of Saudi threats to cut oil production."

Department of State Comments

Saudi oil policy is obviously made on the basis of Saudi perception of their national interest. Over the years, the Saudis have, nonetheless, indicated they have a sophisticated concept of that national interest and how it relates to a broader concern for world energy requirements.

Since mid-1979, Saudi Arabia has maintained significantly higher oil production than its preferred levels, most recently in response to supply shortages resulting from the Iraq/Iran war.

Saudi Arabia has been a price moderate within OPEC. For extended periods -- as at present -- it has priced its crude well below the general OPEC level and below what the world market would sustain. The Saudis have increased their oil prices in the context of recouping funds that would otherwise have gone as subsidies to oil companies and in the interest of pursuing price unification within OPEC with the consequent beneficial result of stabilizing the world oil market.

These production and pricing policies are increasingly criticized in Saudi Arabia. We cannot expect Saudi Arabia to pursue oil policies inconsistent with the Saudi leadership's view of national interest, but it is obvious that the Saudis will be more sympathetic to our concerns on oil issues when we sustain and build their sense of common interest with the Western world and the United States in particular.

10. AIPAC MEMORANDUM

"...Acceding now to the Saudi demand for F-15 offensive add-on equipment will be a test of Saudi Arabia's ability to force the United States into devaluing its own solemn commitments and into working against the national interest of the United States."

Department of State Comments

The United States Government takes the commitment made in 1978 very seriously; we would alter it only for urgent reasons. But the undertaking that the previous Administration made to the Congress with respect to the Saudi F-15s needs to be reevaluated in the light of the profoundly altered security situation in the region. The protection of vital U.S. national interests creates a need to modify the earlier assurances in order to afford adequate protection to the security of Saudi Arabia -- a major objective of U.S. policy in the Middle East for thirty years. Our decision on the F-15 enhancement is part of the new overall strategy in the region, a strategy which should give Israel (as well as our other friends) added security against the USSR and its surrogates.

It would be unwise not to respond to the increased threats to Saudi Arabia and American interests as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution, the Iraq-Iran war, and Soviet aircraft in the Horn of Africa and South Yemen. Our friends understand the new requirements of the dangerous new circumstances. A willingness to respond to those dangers sends a forceful signal to our friends in the region that the U.S. will act in determination to support them and to protect our interests.